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House of Representatives

A BILL INADEQUATE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR VETERANS

**HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my colleagues for allowing me this time.

Because of the unanimous consent request, there was little time for those of us who wanted to speak on behalf of the veterans of the United States to make that argument. We simply have before us a bill that is inadequate to the needs of our Nation's veterans. There are a lot of reasons that have been advanced, and there are a lot of understandings of the parameters which we have to work with, but that is the reality. We simply have not put the money in.

And we see some of these trade-offs that have to go on, like moving money from AmeriCorps to prosthetic research. We have to make those kinds of decisions because we do not have enough money for research in the budget. We do not have enough money for our veterans.

We are \$2 billion under the amount that left this House when we passed the budget resolution. And I love when my colleagues on the other side of the aisle get up and say we should have 2 billion more, but they voted for the rule that puts this bill on the floor and they have not voted for any of the amendments which would put that money back in. The Committee on Rules rejected the amendments that would give us this additional \$2 billion.

Do my colleagues know that we have 160,000 veterans who have been waiting for more than 6 months for their first appointment at the VA center? More than 6 months. Some of them will die before they have their first appointment.

We have disabled veterans who have fought for our Nation who have been waiting 2, 3, or more years to get their adjudication settled. Some will die before they get that claim settled.

(over)

Nurses are being laid off from the VA health care system. We do not seem to have enough money for those nurses.

We have a system where we had one member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from Indiana, say the Priority 7s and 8s are clogging up our system. He has said that our veterans, because they have a certain income or because they did not have a certain level of disability, they are categorized as 7s and 8s. They are veterans, they have protected our Nation; and we have a Member who says they clog the system.

Let us open the system by giving us the resources that we need. Let us open up that system. We cannot leave off veterans because they are clogging it up. The Secretary of our VA, Secretary Principi, and his chief Health Under Secretary, had to send a memo out to his employees, "Do not tell any veterans about their rights because

we cannot handle them. Do not tell veterans about their rights because we cannot handle their business." That is wrong.

We should give the Secretary the amount of money so we can handle all the veterans that are eligible for that and who need that care.

So I thank my colleagues for allowing me this time, but this bill does not honor our Nation's veterans. When our folks in Iraq and Kuwait and Korea and Liberia and Germany and wherever else they are, when they hear that we do not give the VA health care sufficient funds, what happens to their morale? What happens to their sense of what this country is about? We have to respect the men and women in our Armed Forces by giving the respect to our veterans who have fought for our Nation.

I yield back, but I yield back hoping that we put this money back into this budget at the end of the process.